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School of Music, "Le Nuove Musiche" (2005). *School of Music Programs*. 2801.

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Illinois State University
School of Music

Charles W. Bolen Faculty Recital Series

LE NUOVE MUSICHE

Illinois State University Faculty New Music Ensemble



Center for the Performing Arts

April 12, 2005

Tuesday Evening

8:00 p.m.

This is the one hundred and thirty-fifth program of the 2004-2005 season.

Program

Schoenbert – Pierrot Lunaire

Round Table – PIERROT LUNAIRE: history, style, commedia d'arte

Dr. John Celona, University of Victoria – (ISU guest composer/theorist)

Dr. Kim Pereira, ISU School of Theater

Dr. Paul Borg, ISU School of Music

Cezanne's Doubt *World Premiere

Emily Morgan & Jason Ashley, violins

Christopher Kelts, viola

Brian Bromberg, cello

Jessica Boese, clarinet

Glenn Block, conductor

John Celona

(born 1950)

~ Intermission ~

Pierrot Lunaire, Op. 21 (1912)

Arnold Schoenberg

(1874-1951)

A melodrama in three times seven poems

Texts by Otto Erich Hartleben (1864-1905), after Albert Giraud (1860-1929)

Laurance Wieder (English)

Part I

1. Mondestrunken (Moonstruck)
2. Colombine
3. Der Dandy (The Dandy)
4. Eine blasse Wäscherin (A Faded Laundress)
5. Valse de Chopin
6. Madonna
7. Der kranke Mond (The sick moon)

Part II

8. Nacht (Passacaglia) (Night)
9. Gebet an Pierrot (Prayer to Pierrot)
10. Raub (Theft)
11. Rote Messe (Red Mass)
12. Galgenlied (Gallows Song)
13. Enthauptung (Beheading)
14. Die Kreuze (The Crosses)

Part III

15. Heimweh (Homesick)
16. Gemeinsam! (Mean Trick!)
17. Parodie (Parody)
18. Der Mondfleck (The Moonspot)
19. Serenade
20. Heimfahrt (Barcarole) (Journey Home)
21. O alter Duft (O Old Perfume)

Michelle Vought, *sprechstimme*

Paul Borg, *piano*

Kim Risinger, *flute (also piccolo)*

David Gresham, *clarinet (also bass clarinet)*

Sarah Gentry, *violin*

Christopher Kelts, *viola*

Brian Bromberg, *cello*

Kim Pereira, *narrator*

Glenn Block, *conductor*

Program Notes

The *commedia dell'arte* and Pierrot

The *commedia dell'arte* originated as improvised street theatre in 16th-century Italy. Small groups of players entertained with common farcical plots and characters and with exaggerated gestures and acrobatics. The stock characters or "masks"--Pantalone, Dottore, Harlequin, Pulcinella, Colombine, and many others--developed well-known idiosyncrases and relationships. In the 17th and 18th centuries the *commedia dell'arte* spread throughout Europe. Its characters and situations--and something of its disreputable atmosphere--infiltrated written drama, pantomime, puppet theatre, the circus, and carnival celebrations.

In the early *commedia dell'arte*, Pedrolino was a minor character. The role was often given to a younger player, who might also tend and bunk with the troupe animals; hence the name Pagliaccio (*paglia* = straw). Known in France as Pierrot, the character usually wore a white suit with loose sleeves, large buttons, and wide ruffle. Often the face was floured rather than masked. Sensitive, though also a dandy and show-off, Pierrot is eternally frustrated by his love for Colombine. She is alert to his qualities but is unable to resist the coarse Harlequin, Pierrot's mocking friend and tormentor.

Pierrot's modern interpretation began with his portrayal after 1825 by Jean-Gaspard Debureau at the Théâtre des Funambules in Paris. Debureau's Pierrot awakened the interest of Flaubert, Gautier, Baudelaire and other progressive French writers. By the latter decades of the century, symbolist poets were invoking Pierrot as a metaphor for the artist: a nocturnal figure of fantasy, inspired by moonlight, tormented by his inspiration, misunderstood by others. He and his *commedia* friends belonged to the bohemian, amoral, decadent--and thus attractive--world of art. The *commedia* cult was particularly strong between the 1890s and the 1930s: in ballet (Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and *Pulcinella*), in art (Picasso's *Saltimbanques*), in theatre and film, and quite often in music.

Pierrot Lunaire

Belgian poet Albert Giraud published *Pierrot Lunaire*, a collection of fifty poems, in 1884. Imitating the French symbolists, Giraud plays, somewhat morbidly, on standard Pierrot themes and images. Symbolist artificiality is present in the 13-line *rondeau* structure of each poem, in which lines 1 and 2 return as lines 7 and 8, and line 1 yet again as line 13. Berlin cabaret poet Otto Erich Hartleben was sufficiently attracted by Giraud's collection to publish a free German translation in 1892, keeping the poems' *rondeau* format but, by all accounts, improving their quality. Composer Otto Vrieslander set most of the poems to music in 1904. Catching the *commedia* fashion, Viennese actress Albertine Zehme began to give cabaret performances of the poems as melodrama: spoken recitation to Vrieslander's music. Early in 1912, Zehme sought more effective settings. She commissioned Schoenberg, who had recently returned to Berlin, to make new melodrama settings. Schoenberg responded by setting twenty-one of the poems for reciter (*Sprechstimme*) and a chamber group of five players on eight instruments: piano, flute/piccolo, clarinet/bass clarinet, violin/viola, and cello. At the first performances, Zehme, dressed as Colombine, appeared alone in front of dark screens, behind which the musicians played. These performances were a great success--one of the very few Schoenberg was ever to enjoy.

Music and Text

Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* became one of the twentieth century's seminal works, its novel features widely admired and influential. Prominent among these is Schoenberg's use of "*Sprechgesang*" (speech-song) for the text recitation. Schoenberg intended the delivery to be half-way between song and natural speech. Controversy persists over what he had in mind with his instructions, but the reciter's practice of hitting the notated pitches and immediately moving away from them yields a surreal vocal inflection that heightens the bizarre texts. This recitation is embedded in a kaleidoscopic variety of instrumental colours and textures; no two songs use the same instruments in the same way.

Also destabilizing is Schoenberg's atonal treatment of pitch materials. For tonality's orienting force, Schoenberg substitutes freely varied motives (especially notable is the seven-note figure introduced as an ostinato in the first song and liberally transformed in several others; see the musical example), repeated chords and intervals, and intervallic patterns. Several pieces feature contrapuntal devices: a passacaglia in song 8, a complex fugue-canon-retrograde structure in song 18, and canonic passages in others. There are also parodies of Waltz and other gestures scattered throughout the songs.

Apparently late in the compositional process, Schoenberg arranged the settings in three groups of seven. (It's been suggested that Schoenberg, who was superstitious about numbers, chose the lucky numbers 3 and 7 to counteract the unlucky 13 lines in each poem--just as he chose 21 songs to make up his op. 21.) A loose progression of images and themes runs through his arrangement. Pierrot's inspirations and delusions gradually become morbid in the first group; images of paranoia, violence, and horror grip him in the second; and he recovers to express sentimentality and nostalgia in the third. The poems are pervaded by three stark color-images: white--the color of Pierrot, of the moonlight, the pallor of sickness; black--the colour of the night sky, of death; and red--the colour of blood. Though the combination of these grotesque poems and their startling settings may now strike us as embodying German Expressionist neurosis, Schoenberg later said he conceived *Pierrot Lunaire* in "a light, ironical, satirical tone."